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THE HIGH COMEDY OF PHILOSOPHY.

There can be no vision without laughter.

SOME time ago I was discussing before a university class the different phases of philosophy, and not unnaturally the discussion involved many of the various definitions of philosophy that have been, to speak geologically, deposited through the ages. The number was appalling. Although it is not difficult to show a certain underlying agreement among them all, it still remains that there have been about as many definitions as philosophers. Indeed many a philosopher has indulged himself and puzzled the world with more than one, for, like many other things, philosophy changes in meaning with changes of standpoint or mood. But, as definition after definition passed before the view, the situation finally struck me as very amusing, and the cause for amusement was not merely the large number—which, I hasten to say, I did not try to exhaust—nor the great and amazing variety, ranging all the way from “a disease,” albeit a “sacred” one, to “perfect wisdom” or “the science of the sciences,” and from “the highest music” or “imitation of deity” or “meditation on death” to “the science that equates entity with nonentity and nonentity with entity,” but also the unbridled extravagance, not to say the splendid absurdity, the superlativism of nearly every one.

“What a comedy this all is!” I found myself exclaiming inwardly and on the impulse of the moment I boldly added

to all the other definitions one more, as follows: "Philosophy is the highest comedy." So, doubtless, many of the other definitions came to be and so in one more way had philosophy made claim to a superlative! But—this bit of personal biography is nearly at an end—having fallen into that new definition of philosophy I was obviously under the necessity of either getting out of it, for it might prove a very deep hole indeed, or of explaining what I meant and proving the right of it even to the point of transforming what looked like a deep hole into a mountain-top with a fine view. So, not without some confidence, I set to work and in the end I convinced myself, if not others, that whatever truth or value might belong to other definitions no one could ever understand philosophy who failed to feel the comedy of it or be himself a philosopher who had no sense of humor. There could indeed be no real vision without laughter.

Of course philosophy is very commonly laughed at. Aristophanes set an example some years ago and in this matter instruction either by example or precept, however stimulating, has never been really needed. The philosopher has been the butt of much laughter, both open and with its head in the sand, ever since he began to make a spectacle of himself by philosophizing. He has made sport for others generally, not merely for the unphilosophical—are there any such?—readers of this essay. But *why* has he been laughed at? Any philosophical reader excepted as a matter of course, *because* in so many ways and with so much calm assurance he allows himself to be amazingly absurd and *because*, as I have to add, only suggesting how his disease may be not wholly without sanctity, he does appear even in his folly to see something not wholly unreal and to say something not wholly untrue.

Does any one ask me, out of his wonder and innocence, in what ways philosophy is absurd? Let some of the popu-

lar accounts of philosophy that seem not to have come to his notice give reply. However trite they will afford a very good introduction to my apology for the new definition. Thus here is one account.

Philosophy answers two questions in its own inimitable way. What is matter? Never mind! And mind? No matter!

Again, while art is all *eye* and religion is all *aye*, philosophy is also all *I*.

Then philosophy is anything that no one understands or in its arguments—it is always arguing—it is the gathering together in the name of truth of two or more not one of whom ever knows what he himself or any other is talking about. Philosophy is not art, not law, not science, not common sense, not religion, not anything in fact that any normal man cares about; and being so exclusive of all the ornaments or utilities or inspirations of life it is—here comes what is at least next to being its worst absurdity—ludicrously, unless after all I should say superbly, impractical.

Impractical philosophy is in any case; and this, although, reading such a wise interpreter of things human as George Meredith, we learn—is here possibly only one more jibe, carefully concealed, at the philosopher?—that, as the feet are necessary to dancing, so is philosophy to all living.

What can Meredith have meant? Whatever he meant, appreciation or ridicule, in view of the popular regard of philosophy it would hardly be extravagant to picture some specially bold philosopher, as metaphysical and ontological and epistemological and cosmological and even theological as bold, starring on some stage—I will not try to describe its scenery beyond suggesting that on the basis of a five-act play the home, the market-place, the state-house, the laboratory and the parish-house or church might very prop-

erly be represented—and on the other side of the footlights in all their evening regalia the performing philosopher's fellow townsmen or fellow countrymen and their families—successful merchants, great statesmen, distinguished scientists, reverent priests and in the upper regions the lower classes. What a merry time that audience would have and are we now having with them!

And philosophy, whether wise enough to laugh itself or not (for the moment I waive the possibility) is laughable. Its certain unintelligibility—suggesting the fool; its violence to ordinary words of standard meanings—suggesting Mrs. Malaprop or some cousin of that estimable lady; its extravagance of contradiction or paradox—suggesting the would-be popular politician; its habitual importunity amounting often to impertinence—suggesting the book-agent who forces on one something one does not want and, wanting or not, can not afford; and, figuratively when not literally, its lack of decent covering—suggesting discovered and discomfited privacy; all these things only show how laughable, how truly and seriously laughable, philosophy is. And yet—although modesty would forbid me to say this if present company were not always excepted or if the joke were not still very much on the philosophers—all the world loves not merely a lover but also whatever makes it laugh, I mean, makes it laugh really and seriously.

Philosophy the highest comedy! We are beginning to understand what that may signify, at least so far as it concerns those who look on. And what is comedy? No easy question. In trying to answer it, too, I dare not be philosophical. Philosophically I should have to say quite boldly: True comedy is real tragedy, tragedy at its limit, tragedy so sweetly coated as to be enjoyed, in short, tragedy quite out-tragedied. Or, again, employing the same forbidden subtlety: With respect now to its effect true comedy is laughter defying the tears that ought to flow or it is the

laughter of those who have wept until they laughed or are laughing having omitted or forgotten their more natural weeping. Or, just once more, in another vein but still philosophically: True comedy is a synthetic manifestation, under conditions of subjective surprise or unpreparedness, of incongruous elements of life or thought.

Such comic, if not also tragic accounts of comedy aside, however, we all know—observe often not without sorrow—that even a pun has its humor, its comic elements, and for this reason; that although on very superficial ground, in a word on merely verbal similarities, nevertheless it brings together as in a flash objects or ideas that are strange to each other. The meeting of extremes, as when the long and the short of it dance together—excuse the reminder of *Meredith* again—is the greatest joke of the day, of any day; nay—is there a door handy for my escape?—of eternity itself!

Puns at least, then, make extremes meet and, although their comedy must always or almost always be very light or, to offer a luminous if not lurid illustration, very *puny*—that one is weak enough to act, too, as a homeopathic cure,—nevertheless they fill the bill as to certain essentials. Vaudeville performances are perhaps an attenuation better. Their “syntheses of the incongruous” are certainly sudden enough and the incongruity is obvious enough, but! In truth there is a very large *but*. Even like puns, the vaudeville comedies are all too accidental or too superficial. They rest on no comprehension, no insight, no real depth and breadth of actual human life. The pun is only verbally deep. The vaudeville performance is silly, being only accidentally deep. Yet in both we find the ingredients, however poorly measured and mixed,—excuse the intemperance of my figure—of a potion that will make all who drink laugh. Measure them and mix them aright and the results will be alarming as well as philosophical. Always

the great need is more insight; the discovery, I suppose among other things, of the real tragedy that any comic situation, any meeting of extremes, must always hold. Real comedy, true comedy, the comedy that awakens, not hollow, empty, idle, foolish, but real, honest, serious, human laughter, demands insight; and, merely showing how magnificently the two work together, insight, real, honest, free, human insight has never failed to make laughter; not loud guffawing, not silly grinning, not loose joshing or jeering, but laughter. Very real laughter is sometimes so hearty and so—I mean but will not say—so profound that it never, or at least only very rarely, gets beyond the eyes. Such laughter were even spoiled if heard; a notion that quite accords with the statement of one authority—only I do not remember either his name or his exact words—that the best laughter is that which looks rather than sounds, the laughter, in short, of those who laugh to themselves. But, suppressing now even our own smiles, whatever other excesses we may deny ourselves, we must never again take comedy that has no stick of insight well mixed and generously mixed in it.

And now, besides knowing what comedy is, we are beginning to understand how philosophy is comic or even how it may be the highest comedy. Its insight, if insight it ever have, must be what makes it always comedy and, because with its insight go all those other things, unintelligibility, paradox, impracticability and the rest, the itinerary of this essay, now obliged to cease its rambling, is well laid out.

Quite seriously we have to consider the real humor of insight and of each of its numerous distinguished attendants. This humor, I foresee, as we catch it and come to feel it intelligently will account not more for the amusement of those who laugh at philosophy under such provocation as has been shown already than for a natural and

necessary humor of philosophy itself. In other words, from this point on the philosopher may laugh with us, and, although we shall not allow him to say that he who laughs last laughs best, we may have to admit that the order of one's laughter has something to do with its quality. In passing, furthermore, I would now go so far as to say—showing how my definition has grown on me—that only such philosophy can be true as, in the first place, makes other people laugh and, in the second place, has brought to its propounder a laughter which, however controlled and merely ocular, is at least as hearty and as human as that of any of his fellows. The pragmatist's test, requiring that what is true be that which "works" or "goes," can not hold a candle to this test of provoked merriment.

With regard, then, to the natural humor of insight, of philosophical insight, it must be assumed of course that the philosopher really does see something; that is, to be quite specific, that such well accredited philosophers as Parmenides, Socrates, Plato, Democritus, Plotinus, Aquinas, Spinoza, Hume, Kant and Hegel—I dare not come down any farther, although even in the last century, I feel sure, Mark Twain and Nietzsche were not the only humorists—really had some vision. Making such an assumption we can quickly catch the humor, or the comedy, of insight, for even with little knowledge of history we know that the philosopher has always seen what others have not seen. Sometimes others have said they saw it when they really did not or, perhaps with more truth, that they knew there was something there although they or their eyes, even their mind's eyes, quite failed to discover it, but in either case there is cause for amusement.

When one man stares with enraptured gaze at what other men can not even see, it is high time that somebody smiled, since incongruous things are met together, and the fun is only enhanced by the fact that the seer in the case

would suffer no serious check upon his vision did he tightly shut his own eyes. A blind philosopher, too, has never been as blind as others without the use of their eyes. To adopt a saying from Heraclitus, who, while known as "the weeping philosopher," was not without his merry jests: "Men in their folly are like the blind. Of them does the proverb bear witness that they are absent when present. Having eyes men see not and lacking eyes they see." And Heraclitus himself did not need his eyes to see what he finally saw. So what a veritable nest of jokes! No wonder that a man with so much humor unbent at times and even through his weeping indulged himself in a very little pun, albeit Hellenic: "The bow (*biós*) is called life (*bios*), but its work is death."

The rich humor of insight is more than a matter of one man seeing without eyes and others not seeing with them. What the insight reveals has this very humorous quality: It is so commonplace as not to have been noticed and so unnoticed as to seem upon discovery almost if not quite wonderful and even miraculous. The very essence of insight is discovery, not of anything outside of life or nature, but of what dwells quite within life or nature, not of what something outside is, but of what this life or this nature really is. So for insight are the always seen and the not seen, the familiar and the novel, the commonplace and the wonderful met together, and could anything be more laughable?

We all laugh at the man who, wearing his glasses, looks for them and he himself, his search at last over, laughs too, but the investigations and discoveries of philosophy are quite similar:

"I would know how I know;"

"I live and I would live as I ought to live;"

"That which I am I will to be;"

"I will that not my will but the will of God or of my

own real self or of what is true and good and beautiful be done;"

"The world really is, not what everybody finds it, but what I think or make it."

Such things and many others like them, very humorous things I submit, transforming as they do the commonplace into the important, the already real into the ideal or yet to be realized,—such truly funny things the philosopher is saying in so many words all the time. They are very essential parts of his stock in trade.

Philosophy in respect to what it sees and says is so different from science. Science deals with what can be isolated and so with what can be studied objectively, methodically, exactly, and described quite logically and soberly, but philosophy with what can not be isolated, that is, set off and out by itself, and so with what is never special or local but is instead universal. Thus science depends on limitation of the field but philosophy would be helpless were the field limited. Science would see what can be seen as this or that here or there and now or then, but philosophy would even see the seeing or be the being for which there can be no such boundaries. The isolable and formally describable or explainable, insists philosophy, can not be the vital; the manifest object of experience can not be either the real experience or the real thing experienced; for vitality or reality are wholes, not prosaically isolable and definable parts.

Dealing, then, with what is too vital to be isolated, too commonplace or too natural and essential to be nicely measured or upon discovery to be in any way regarded soberly, and I may add, too general to be apprehended as the things of space and time are apprehended, philosophy is bound to a peculiar task.

While science can be and must be sober, philosophy can not be and must not be so. To use a flippant phrase

in a very serious way, philosophy is constrained to be intemperate to the point of "seeing things." Imagination instead of direct observation, speculation instead of "eminently respectable" reasoning, poetic thinking instead of prosaic thinking are its proper, however unconventional, methods. Simply it has no choice but to look as best it can and with what saving sense of humor it can and with due sense of the amusing figure it is bound to cut before all respectable citizens, at what is commonly quite invisible. Only a quasi-vision is thus possible to philosophy and its speculations, but how the philosophers have looked at what they have seen so fictitiously!

Just to illustrate how the philosophers "see things": There was once a man, of whom the reader knows and at whom he may laugh or smile as affectionately as he pleases, who lived in a world of things-in-general and had all the relations of his life to these. Would you appreciate his unusual plight? Then think how it would be, how strange, if not how hair-raising, to catch sight of a tree-in-general out there on my lawn—which would in fact have to be a lawn-in-général—with birds-in-general singing songs-in-general from the branches-in-general and, while listening-in-general to the peculiar beauty-in-general of that generic music, to be disturbed by the bark-in-general of some passing dog-in-general. Think of that, I say, and then reflect that Plato, among others, had some such experience—philosophically and to-the-gaiety-of-nations-ly.

Plainly philosophical vision calls for humor. Its rapturous gaze at the invisible, its startling discovery of the commonplace and its universal view, its quasi sight of the whole or the general, are all most laughable; so laughable indeed that it is a relief to know how much the philosophers have laughed themselves. The gloomy Heraclitus, as we have seen, was a rich humorist. Socrates had his irony. The dialogues of Plato were loaded with merriment—al-

though not always as choice as might be wished, as when the arguing sophist Thrasymachus is answered with the reminder that he really needs to wipe his nose. And vision, as I keep repeating, has always brought laughter. Seeing beyond accepted forms and standards it has always brought the freedom from these, the license, the unbending, of which laughter is such an excellent expression. But vision, or insight, was said to have a train of attendants, its court-fools, and some of these, to which we may now turn, have been, and still are, inimitable jesters.

Probably I do not need to speak again, certainly not at any length, of unintelligibility. I would only assure you that it is the business, if not quite the conscious duty, of philosophy to be at least reasonably unintelligible. What I mean by "reasonably" any good lawyer may decide, being so much more competent to do so than I. But, as to the unintelligibility, to all that has been said I merely add that what men commonly understand or can understand is relative to prevailing views and tests, whereas philosophy and its vision can count for nothing if they do not imply something radically different from what prevails. So true is this that vision being still shadowed by the old standards is always greatly puzzled itself, having quite as much the character of a *what* as of a *that*.

"Yet my vision," interrupts the philosopher, "although puzzling to me and unintelligible to others, although very irregular, informal, unconventional and alien, is not without supreme meaning. Far better is it to be right and unintelligible than under the law! And even death itself were better than that I should betray my vision!"

Not so heavily serious, Mr. Philosopher, if you please. Your usual heroics are not needed here, for we are now readily sympathetic and at the moment are so affable that we would even prefer you to be unintelligible, enjoying you—such is our present happy mood—much more and ap-

preciating you more, too, in that rôle; that is, if you will be at least reasonably unintelligible!

Closely connected with philosophy's unintelligibility, which might be said to vary directly with its insight, there is a much remarked and much criticized violence to names. "Why not speak the king's English?" says some real man to some—let no unphilosophical person put it in this way—fool philosopher; "Or," going on, "if you must think so differently from real men, why don't you invent a language of your own?"

Good questions these and quite answerable according to their own folly, but I will meet them as soberly as I can. Replying to both at once I say simply that the vital service of philosophy, as necessary to life, you remember, as feet to dancing, must always depend on its strange and even shocking use of familiar words, on different meanings for standard terms.

A certain reader of a certain philosophical essay, that searched matters rather more deeply and freely even than is usual, had no comment to make but this: "What offensive profanity!" and in a sense, insight must always be profane, using many precious words in a shocking way. Small wonder that an unusually intelligent classifier in the library at the University of Michigan shelved a certain book, *A Cursory History of Swearing*, with the *other* histories of philosophy!

But there is profanity and there is profanity, just as there is lawlessness—that of destruction—and lawlessness—that of reform. What really is life or anything connected with life? Such is the philosophical question, and the answer, however profane, must come: "No longer that, however sacred, but this!" The old word must remain too; else there were no point and no challenge. Life—not something Sanskrit or Hottentot—life in good, unhesitating king's English is this startling thing now newly revealed.

Of course men never dreamed of any such marvelous meaning for the term; of course its new use shocks them terribly; but so much more reason that they should be made to look to their speech, not to say to the thought back of it.

Where, however, is the humor? The humor of old names for new things may be seen in the following tale from Mark Twain's *Adam's Diary*. In the Diary, as you know, Mark recounts how Adam and Eve went about the Garden naming the wonders thereof, the strange animals and the rest. They came at last upon a galli-wasp. What should they call it? Adam, usually quick with fitting names, was hopelessly puzzled, but Eve, her woman's intuition no doubt serving her now in good stead, exclaimed: "Adam, let's call it a galli-wasp." "But, Eve," cries Adam, "why call it a galli-wasp?" "Because," came the woman's answer, "because it really looks so much like one." Eve had the vision which naming strange things always requires. The story is known to all and, perhaps too obviously, I have told it in my own way, but it will indicate very well the pleasant comedy of all naming. Also it has had for me its analogies in many of the discoveries of philosophy. Thus, here is one, as significant and humorous as any of the others.

There was once a Greek, Anaxagoras, who was, so we are told, the first to call something he found in the walks of life by the name of mind = *nous*. The thing so called had been in the lives and experiences of his predecessors for years and the word, the name, was a standard word in the language, having been in good usage nobody knows how long. Anaxagoras, however, was the first to apply the name to the thing. And why? Again Eve's reason. Perhaps Anaxagoras had a wife of his own and her woman's intuition to help him out. Of that we can only guess. In any case the reason was unhesitatingly this: Because the thing discovered looked so very much like mind.

But, once more: "This is what life is," exclaimed the hero in our last novel, "I never knew before what it was nor how great it was." "Why?" you might have asked him, and answering he must have joined the chorus of all discoverers: "Because it looks so like the old old thing!"

In a final sum then, the new strange thing that is like some old thing is as near to being the philosopher's stone as any thing I know and if I may hold the figure, it is a stone that owes no small part of its mystic color and luster to the humor of the new naming or of the strange likeness that must always attach to it.

But naming the new things in the walks of life is probably the very simplest way in which philosophy at once shocks and amuses people when it tries to express what it has discovered. Unintelligible as it often is because of its violence to terms, it is made doubly unintelligible by its readiness to utter its wisdom in paradoxes. For the life of insight the descent to paradox is easy.

What really is this thing? Life? The world? God? Self? What is it *really*? The question itself shows that strangers are already standing at the door of one's tent, and the strangers must be met. Yet how? The thing inquired about must be hospitable; it must identify itself with what it has never been, receiving the strangers at least as possible angels. But such hospitality means paradox, the bringing together of things opposed. Strangers start inquiry; inquiry makes thought; thought would entertain the strangers; and the result, in fact if not always in form, is paradox.

Every name, newly applied, always hides a paradox, but all the paradoxes of thought and its discoveries are not hidden. The Greek thought and in the end made the discovery that he himself also was a barbarian. The Jew found himself also a Gentile. Christian meekness, as has often been said, has had some of its best expressions in the

lives of Jews. And in general in the relations of men and in the relations of things thought has had a way of reversing normal conditions. Indeed at least at one stage in its activity paradox has always seemed the only adequate and candid way of expressing what has been seen.

So man was found to be non-human, at least to the point of being a monkey, a quondam monkey; and I do not need to multiply the cases of thought's paradoxical transformations. The thinker can no more avoid paradoxes than a statesman can avoid inconsistency.

Of course the paradox is irregular; it does not belong in well-ordered society and conversation; it violates logical conventions horribly; it is perhaps the philosopher's most striking way of staring into the dark, of looking, as if entranced, at what others can not see; but it is as indispensable to thought, which must be constantly outgrowing its forms and which finds nothing more thoroughly informal than paradox, as—what shall I say?—as life and death are to growth.

That comparison is also a good illustration. See beneath the surface of things and life and death, as also cold and hot, lawfulness and lawlessness, good and evil, divine and human, infinite and finite, become definable in terms of each other. Thought, in short, never fails to make the very strangest bed-fellows.

So, again, the comedy of philosophy is presented to us. If up and down, order and disorder, man and monkey, light and darkness, good and evil, life and death are the same, this world is indeed a stage and the performance—I do not need to advertise it as continuous—is dangerously near to being—what is the phrase?—a side-splitting farce. Only, the issues are serious and, laugh as we must, we always feel, all the more for our laughing, that a vital truth lies hidden in those strange ways or those strange words of men.

In professional philosophy, at least for its ordinary history, the comedy of philosophical paradox began when Anaximander crossed the stage and said in so many words: "All things are nothing"; a declaration that may well suggest the hospitable invitation to dinner *any* evening, obviously equivalent to no real invitation, and Heraclitus continued the performance with all sorts of mystic announcements about good and evil being the same, justice depending on injustice, immortals being mortal and mortals being immortal, and so on almost *ad infinitum* and quite *ad immoderatum risum*. Then came Anaxagoras with his elements or cosmic parts so side-splittingly wonderful as each by being infinitesimally small to contain the whole cosmos and soon after Anaxagoras arrived Socrates whose supreme wisdom lay, as he amused himself much and others some by saying, in his knowing that he knew nothing.

Aristotle, strangely enough, was not a paradoxist, but he relieved the play by being delightfully direct and flat. Quite parenthetically may I speak of him? Flatness, so different from paradox, is after all only another medium for the expression of insight and so another way of not being understood. Thus how profoundly wise it was of Aristotle to assure his fellow men that the way to learn to do anything was to go ahead and do it, that sight or vision was the subtle process by which man apprehends the visible, and generally that as man is able in any way the world about him is correspondingly possible. I have sometimes thought that the following lines by Ben King might have been dedicated very appropriately to Aristotle:

"Nothing to do but work,
Nothing to eat but food,
Nothing to wear but clothes
To keep one from going nude.

"Nothing to breathe but air—
Quick as a flash 'tis gone.

Nowhere to fall but off,
Nowhere to stand but on.

“Nothing to comb but hair,
Nowhere to sleep but in bed,
Nothing to weep but tears,
Nothing to bury but dead.

“Nothing to sing but songs,
Ah well, alas, alack,
Nowhere to go but out,
Nowhere to come but back.

“Nothing to see but sights,
Nothing to quench but thirst,
Nothing to have but what we've got,
Thus through life we are cursed.

“Nothing to strike but against,
Everything moves that goes,
Nothing at all but common sense
Can ever withstand these woes.”

But Aristotle in his day could be flat and wise at the same time, for he was free from the peculiar restraints of form and tradition that had forced the vision of his predecessors to express itself paradoxically. Still, if only for their contrast, the Aristotelian tautologies and platitudes have a humorous quality all their own.

Leaving Aristotle, however, the comedy of philosophy of course did not close with him, although I can hardly turn this essay into a comedian's history of philosophy. St. Augustine was a good deal of a humorist. So was Aquinas. So, too, was Spinoza with his one God, or substance, his infinite attributes of that substance, his infinite modes of each attribute and his infinite finite modes of each infinite mode, for there is a point beyond which even infinity is best met with a good laugh. As to Spinoza, too, I am sure that his own humor, quiet as it was and obviously had to be, saved him under conditions that must have robbed most men of all balance of either thought or feeling.

Then there was Kant, but his *Critique of Pure Reason* must speak for itself; and Hegel's humor is known to everybody. Certainly Hegel has saved philosophy from losing sight of the merry paradox for many a day. The thing that was not at once its own negative or other had no interest whatever for Hegel, as forsooth it should have no interest whatever for you or me. We sometimes say of a man that he is one who will not stop at anything, meaning so to reproach him, but according to Hegel there is nothing that anybody ought to stop at. So there you are and being there you are doubtless wondering also, as you promptly should, where—how shall I put it without profanity?—under the sun you are.

But the case is now quite clear. Philosophy is a comedy, even the highest comedy; thanks to its paradoxes but not without some gratitude also to its platitudes and to some other things, general or particular, to its eyeless vision, and its profane speech and its foolish—or wise?—unintelligibility. I have yet to speak of its impractical nature. Still, why should we spend time on that? Philosophy, remember, is as necessary to life as feet to dancing, and dancing is what one practices, not feet. Philosophy always impractical? Of course! What else would you have? And the philosopher's salvation is the laughter for which he is so ready whenever he really sees things and with the comfort and support of which he can do anything that *is* practical—even rendering unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's. The compromises which practice must ever force upon vision are no longer compromises but ideal working measures, when they are taken with proper humor.

With needless modesty, doubtless, I have said nothing of the philosopher's lack of clothes; nor was I going to say anything. The lack is so obvious and others might be embarrassed, even if the philosopher should not be, to have such a matter discussed. Mention ought to suffice,

if even mention be not too much. But the trouble is that the philosopher exposes other people no less than himself. Of course the nude in art has interested many—for its sensuality—for its purity—and the nude in science has also had its students who have commonly known it by another name, the natural, the objective, the physically or materially true and real. But the nude in philosophy—the exposure that philosophy makes, or at least thinks to make, of all that lies beneath the outward appearances of men's lives, making those appearances at most only the most gauzy draperies—is certainly not less likely to catch and hold the gaze of curious mankind, looking as men always will at the sordid and material, at the heroic and spiritual, whenever and wherever exposed.

Still, if I keep on, I shall have everybody blushing for his disclosed smallness or for his uncovered greatness and tears instead of the intended laughter may spoil my comedy just as it is about to draw to *such* a successful close. I have wished only to make evident the humorous discomfiture of exposure for people that have been thinking their inner motives and ideals, their hopes and their loves, their fears and their hates, at least decently clothed. What a jest, I mean what a fabric of gauze, any institution is!

And at the court of philosophy—did I forget to say, of course with Plato, that the philosopher is the only natural king?—there are others beside those mature jesters whom we have been hearing. Thus there is a swarm of youthful and mischievous pages. The philosopher's formula, for example, that means everything, the whole universe in fact, yet really is applicable to absolutely nothing. And—is it safe to let this fellow in?—the philosopher's pecuniary wage, which he gets for wisdom that is so unconventional as to be quite without price. But here embarrassment, if not resentment, overcomes me and I refuse

to go on, exposing the philosopher to another of these rogues!

Philosophy *is* comedy, the highest comedy; and I can brook no rival for philosophy in this distinction, save possibly one. Should somebody insist that religion showed a still deeper humor, that the God who made the rain, for good or for ill, fall alike on the just and on the unjust or always, not merely on Calvary, brought reformer and malefactor to the same death just as earlier he had brought them into the same life of violence to the law, must be the supreme humorist and should therefore never be worshiped without the possibility of a smile on the face of his worshipers nor pictured without a smile at least in his all-wise eyes, in all probability I should make no protest. Religion is the divine comedy.

But surely, insists some one before I can get away, surely philosophy *is* not merely comedy. Of course not. Nor is comedy. The meeting of things incongruous always brings tragedy too. Have you already forgotten those definitions of comedy that I "dared not give"? In the history of national literatures tragedies and comedies very properly have arisen together—at such time, be it remarked, as when little man has run up against big nature and has succeeded in showing how much bigger than nature he really was!—and have reached their extremes *pari passu*. But through the pages of this essay—why must I still have to tell you that it is time to laugh?—I have simply chosen to laugh with philosophy and have asked you to join in the merriment. Some day I may boldly invite your tears on the same evidence, but not now. Enough now that there can be no vision without laughter.

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